

MITCHELL, EMMA.

INTERVIEW

8717

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BIOGRAPHY FORM.
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

MITCHELL, EMMA.

INTERVIEW

#8717

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry

This report made on (date) September 20 1937

1. Name Mrs. Emma Mitchell

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 721 South Miles Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 26 Year 1863

5. Place of birth Chase County, Kansas

6. Name of Father Anderson Sharp Place of birth Anderson

Other information about father County, Tennessee

7. Name of Mother Elizabeth (Davis) Sharp Place of birth Grant

Other information about mother County, Indiana

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 1

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Anna R. Barry
Journalist
September 20, 1957.

Interview with Mrs. Emma Mitchell
721 South Miles Street
El Reno, Oklahoma.

Emma (Sharp) Mitchell was born in Chase County, Kansas, on September 26, 1863, the daughter of Anderson Sharp and Elizabeth (Davis) Sharp. Her parents homesteaded on a claim not far from the little town of Bazaar, Kansas, and her first school was in a little log cabin located three and one-half miles from her home, her first teacher was Mr. Henry Greenleaf.

In 1880, she married John Mitchell; the first year they located on a farm near his parents' home, but the next winter they moved to Pratt County, Kansas, and continued to live in Kansas until the Fall of 1889. It was the latter part of October when they decided to leave Kansas to come to Oklahoma, with hopes that they could still find a claim to settle on.

Loading two wagons with needful things such as bedding, a cook stove, several pieces of furniture, a sod plow, and a few hens, they also brought nine head of cattle and as they traveled along, other wagons joined them and by the time they had reached Caldwell ten wagons were in the caravan. After

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they had gone about seven miles from Caldwell they camped for the night and during the night a storm blew up from the north, snowing and blowing. The next morning it was so cold that it was a task to cook breakfast, as the only way they had of cooking was on an open campfire. That morning most of the men decided the best thing to do was to drive back to Caldwell, put the women and children on the train and send them on to Oklahoma City and after they reached Oklahoma City, each family could branch out to itself.

Mrs. Mitchell came on the stage to El Reno, bringing her only child, a son, who was four years old at this time. After arriving in El Reno, she went to the home of her parents who were located six miles southeast of El Reno to wait for the arrival of her husband. After about eight days wait her husband arrived with their two wagons.

Mrs. Mitchell and her husband located on a relinquished claim eight miles southeast of El Reno; their first home was a dugout about eight by ten feet. After Christmas they built a little two roomed frame house, hauling the lumber from

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Old Frisco. At that time the section lines had not been established and in the winter of 1889 not many people lived on their claims but many went back to their home states, while others lived with their relatives, in little two roomed houses and often as many as three families could be found living together.

The first spring, 1890, they just planted small patches of sod corn, lots of melons, beans, pumpkins and peas. The only fruit at that time was wild plums, but Mrs. Mitchell did not have many jars to can the plums in so she cooked the plums, ran them through a home made colander (this she made by punching holes in a syrup bucket), took this pulp, put several cups of sugar into it and cooked it until it was very thick. She then took clean boards and spread this plum butter on these boards, which she placed in the sun to dry. After several days in the sun this butter became very hard, and she then cut strips of this which she placed in clean flour sacks and hung on the wall to dry; she calls this "plum leather".

The first well they made on their claim was a dug well, walled up with native rock and over this well they built a

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frame, from which hung a bucket and rope; this well was twenty-five feet deep and the water was excellent and in later years her husband put up a windmill over this well.

El Reno was the Mitchell family's closest trading point and they usually came to El Reno once a week with the wagon and team, provided the husband wasn't too busy with his crops. If this was the case they traded at a little country store called Liberty which was located three miles from the Mitchell home; this store in early days was operated by a man named Barrett. The Mitchell family also received their mail at the little Liberty post office. Mrs. Mitchell always looked forward each evening, when she and her little son would ride horseback to the post office after the mail.

Later, when lumber yards were opened up for business and building material became available frame houses began to make their appearance on the homesteaders' claims and where there was sufficient timber, the farms were fenced. When the country was first opened for settlement, the roads generally followed the easiest grades and the shortest distances regardless of section lines or property rights.

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Reno City was Canadian County's largest town when the Mitchell family landed here. It was estimated that between fifteen hundred to two thousand settlers had established themselves on the townsite north of the Canadian River. The settlers in Reno City had every reason to believe in the future success of this new city, since the Rock Island railroad in building south from Caldwell, Kansas, had already surveyed their line and the stakes marking the route across the Canadian Valley could be seen, assuring the Reno City settlers that their town would soon have the railroad. But when the Rock Island officials appeared and demanded that the town site company divide their real estate holdings with the railroad company on a fifty-fifty basis the offer was rejected. The Rock Island did business with Reno City's rival (El Reno) on the south side of the river and when the railroad was constructed a year or so later it left Reno City stranded nearly two miles from railway connections. It wasn't long until Reno City moved to El Reno.

Emma Mitchell was a very busy woman, like all other pioneer mothers; the children's clothes were made at home, rugs braided and woven, stockings darned, quilts quilted and besides all this she found time to help in the garden and in the fields when help

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was needed. The Mitchell family grew until there were five children. In later years they sold their homestead and bought a farm four miles southeast of El Reno. Mrs. Mitchell's husband died in 1922 and is buried in the Red Rock Cemetery near El Reno.